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SUBJECT: SPECIAL 301: ROKG ELATED BY REMOVAL FROM WATCH LIST

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¶1. (SBU) AMB phoned Minister of Culture, Sports and Tourism (MCST) Yu In-chon on April 30 to inform him that the USG would remove Korea from the Special 301 Watch List in the Special 301 announcement in Washington later that day. Minister Yu said he was very happy to hear the news, and was pleased that the USG had recognized the priority that he and the ROKG placed on IPR protection, as well as the progress Korea had made in the past year.
¶2. (SBU) Econoff subsequently called on MCST Copyright Policy Division Deputy Director Shin Jong-pil to deliver reftel demarche points (verbally). DD Shin said he was delighted to hear that Korea would be removed from the Watch List. Shin noted that both MCST Minister Yu and President Lee have made IPR protection and enforcement a high priority, and added that for MCST, "on the frontlines of IPR protection," IPR will continue to be the (emphasized) key policy issue. Shin added that Minister Yu, at a recent press conference marking his first anniversary at MCST, had reiterated the importance of IPR protection, noting it benefited both domestic and foreign industry. Other Copyright Policy Division officials expressed pleasure at hearing that Korea's work to improve its IPR regime was being recognized in this manner, and pledged further cooperation on IPR protection and enforcement. Econoff pointed out that Special 301 was a yearly designation, and could be reversed if recent improvements were not sustained; Shin said he understood that, but reiterated that MCST was committed to continued strengthening of Korea's IPR regime.
¶3. (SBU) Econoff also called MOFAT North American Trade Deputy Director Ha Dae-goog to convey demarche points (verbally). Ha said this was welcome news, and that Korea's coming off the Watch List would be viewed as both substantively and symbolically important (it is widely known in Korea's IPR community that the country has been on some level of the Special 301 Watch List every year since the 1980s). Econoff pointed out that Special 301 was a yearly designation and could be reversed in later years if recent improvements were not sustained. Ha asked if there were precedents for countries returning to the Watch List (Econoff explained there were). Ha said the ROKG would be following up on the USG's concerns, and said he knew online piracy was a particular concern for USTR and U.S. stakeholders. Ha noted that MOFAT and MCST would work together on a press release welcoming the Special 301 designation, and would release it on May 1 Seoul time following the official announcement in Washington.
STEPHENS